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ABSTRACT

A challenge faced by the public sector is to keep pace with the rapidly changing management science and the technology that supports it. With a greater emphasis on career mobility, the public sector will be faced with an increased emphasis on the development and training needs of the work force. New York is making substantial progress in equipping its work force to meet the needs of the public it serves through a wide range of training and development programs reaching thousands of employees each year. Public employees need training at various stages in their service: when they enter, assume new substantive responsibilities, take on responsibility for others, and are called to solve problems at the policy level; when requirements of their expertise change; when the context in which they operate changes qualitatively; and when the technologies they use in their work change. Seven major programs address the educational and developmental needs of the state work force: management confidential program, public service training program, Civil Service Employees Association program, agency-specific programs, tuition-reimbursement, joint labor/management sponsored training projects, and the United University Professions program. Tasks that lie ahead for New York are integrating all programs; being more sensitive to nontraditional development opportunities; learning more about the training and development programs being used in the corporate world; and forecasting future employment needs. (YLB)

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The Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government

Rockefeller Institute
Special Report

Knowledge Needs of a Maturing Public Work Force

Third Annual John E. Burton Lecture

Thomas F. Hartnett
New York State Department of Labor

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Thomas F. Hartnett is the former Director of the Governor's Office of Employee Relations. He is currently serving as Commissioner of the New York State Department of Labor.

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$2.00

KNOWLEDGE NEEDS OF A MATURING PUBLIC WORK FORCE

Thomas F. Hartnett
Director
Governor's Office of Employee Relations

It is a privilege to have been invited to give the annual Burton Lecture at Rockefeller College, and to have my efforts in some small way associated with John Burton who, along with Al Smith, was the major architect of the Contemporary New York State Public Service.

It is fashionable these days to devalue the public service. While it may be fashionable, it is not an accurate reflection of reality: New York has an exceptional public work force, the equal of any major employer in the nation, and some of the leading contributors to that high achievement, such as T. Norman Hurd, are in this room.

I would like to talk today about a challenge that we in the public sector face.

That challenge is to keep pace with the rapidly changing management science and the technology that supports it.

The era of "Doing more with less" is complicated by the demographics of the workplace, in particular, our work force is aging, and its members have greater longevity in the workplace. With these changes come new challenges. Today, our employees are working in an environment where there are fewer opportunities for promotion than in the past decade. This combination of factors means that—over time—there will need to be a greater emphasis on career mobility, and that a "successful" career will be measured less on the number of vertical, upward promotions, and more on the number and scope of horizontal assignments an employee receives. As a result, we will be faced with increased emphasis on the development and training needs of our work force.

In a number of respects, New York State's Public Service is similar to a university faculty. To a large degree our public service is characterized today by individuals who make conducting the public's business a lifetime career.

Like you in the university world, many in the public sector have tenure. Ours—through the merit system—was created to avoid undue political interference, while yours began as an assurance of freedom of opinion. Both arrangements have become a form of job security.

To understand the public sector, we should first look at a set of basic facts.

New York is the fourth largest public sector employer in the country, smaller only than the federal government, New York City, and California. Indeed, New York is the eleventh largest employer in the United States, vying in size and complexity of tasks, employee skills with such employers as General Motors, IBM, Sears and General Electric.

Our work force—nearly 200,000 represented by six public sector employee unions and another 14,000 in the management ranks—is larger than many of this nation's cities.

If all the architects employed by New York State were in a single firm, they would comprise the country's largest architectural firm. The same may be said for the State's lawyers.

More than 300,000 personnel transactions are processed each year. And at any single time substantial numbers of our employees are moving in and out of the system, through retirement, attrition or attraction to other job markets.

The average length of service in New York State today is ten years and the average age is 41. When we look at the management ranks alone, the numbers are even more startling—the average age is 44 and years of service is 14.

Senior among state employees as a group are our correctional service supervisors, where the average jumps to 47 and the number of years to 20. Our total work force is split almost equally by sex, women outnumbering men by only one percent.

While yours is a problem of the "graying professoriat," ours is making sure that our public employees can keep abreast of what the public is asking of them. And that is a tall order in the case of New York State as we are talking about large numbers of public servants—ten times the size of the SUNY-wide faculty.

Thus, like you in universities, we have the need to keep all our employees including our graying colleagues lively, committed to their public responsibilities, and willing to respond to challenges as they arise.

There are times that I wish our mission was as simple as that of General Motors or even the employer of my former Bronx days—the New York Telephone Company. In the public sector, however, the nature of our tasks and missions are inherently complex. We attempt to use public dollars in the most efficient ways to carry out tasks that no one else wants to do—tasks that are costly and often unprofitable, like caring for severely retarded children and adults, feeding the most needy among us, and cleaning up toxic waste sites.

There are areas, however, where we are working toward greater simplicity. We have begun to overhaul the state's classification and compensation system—the first since the 1950's.

Among the very first adjustments has been the consolidation of 50 job titles—from among the state's 7,500—to five titles. Additional adjustments are being analyzed.

In concert with this historic update of the classification and compensation system, we have initiated the major phase of the state's pay equity adjustments, upgrading over 47,000 salaries of women and minorities in over 200 job titles in the process.

To meet the changing skills and knowledge needs of a complex and large employee population, New York State, in the eighties, embarked upon a major training initiative for its work force—both for labor-represented employees and its management cadre.

The vision for a maturing, knowledgeable public service began in the Governor's Office of Employee Relations. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the implementation and the philosophy of human resources development for the eighties fell to me and a staff of talented, dedicated managers whose array of educational backgrounds and skills has made the task not only possible, but eminently successful.

The program has not been without cost, but where we spend only a tiny fraction of a percent of the State's budget on per capita training and development, similar size corporations in America are investing between 2 and 4 percent of budget on training.

Despite this dramatic difference, we are making substantial progress in equipping our work force to better meet the needs of the public it serves through a wide range of quality training and development programs reaching literally thousands of employees each year.

As we see it, public employees need training at various stages in their service:

- When they enter;
- When they assume new substantive responsibilities;
- When they take on responsibility for others;
- When they are called to problem-solve at the policy level;
- When the requirements of their expertise change;
- When the context in which they operate qualitatively changes;
- When the technologies they employ in their work change.

Let me illustrate those times when training is required. It is obvious that new entrants into the public service require an orientation not only to their particular jobs, but to the purposes and processes of New York State government. This is as true for the newest secretary as it is for an incoming commissioner.

As people progress in their careers and begin to have new, more substantive responsibilities—such responsibilities as data analysis, financial management, human resource management, planning, and so forth—they need to know what the state of the art is in those areas.

When individuals take on the responsibility for others and for problem-solving for their agency, they need to be trained in what is best and most recent in these activities. We no longer can assume that workers, public or private, can be supervised in a way that neglects the respect they are due or that fails to elicit the performance of which they are capable. Nor can we leave to chance the acquisition of those problem-solving skills we expect of our managers, when so many of the problems they address are so critical and costly.

These, however, are fairly obvious points at which training is necessary. What we are seeing today are additional conditions, often not even comprehended by those who went before us.

By example, a public health worker today must have the expertise to be able to shift from asbestos, to PCBs, to AIDS when responding to workplace and community issues.

The half-life of knowledge in some fields can now be measured in years, not decades. The accelerating pace of change in technologies requires a greater attention to our public work force and what they need to know to do their business: New drugs are available in our health facilities, new construction techniques are relevant to our infrastructure, new technologies become available to eliminate waste, new management techniques have replaced timeworn ideas, and so on. We see case after case where the application of "state-of-the-art" methods and techniques are being used to serve the public better. Employee education is the vehicle for transferring knowledge to the work force. Knowledge, like gold, is the standard of value in an environment where your most important asset is the people you must rely on to accomplish your goals.

What our public expects or will accept from us changes. For example, a decade ago a substantial number of our mental health and mental retardation facilities had been trained in how best to handle issues associated with institutionalization. With the advent of deinstitutionalization, new skills in how to handle challenges associated with this policy have had to be learned and learned quickly.

Confidentiality, freedom of information, civil servant liability issues, miranda rules are all concepts unknown in the time of John Burton, but which constitute the daily fare for today's public servants.

In New York today, we see training and retraining as a career-long and continuous process. Even if an employee is not moving from one position to another, the skills that he or she acquired earlier and even those acquired on the job may not be sufficient for the current demands of the position.

In many instances, it just takes too long to learn "on the job," and what is learned is not always what will serve the public best. Problems change and the work force must be prepared to change as well to meet them.

Let me illustrate these points by describing the case history of a group of New York State managers—the heads of our agencies' electronic data processing activities. Many began as keypunch operators a decade or so ago. Because they had a knack for mainframe computers, some were promoted to positions with responsibility, not only for the machine itself, but for the large number of data entry staff these agencies hired in the 60s and 70s. As the job progressed, these managers found themselves in the thick of developing administrative systems.

Soon they were asked to oversee a related technology, telecommunications, and began increasingly to assist the process of turning the transactions their mainframes contained into data for management decision-making. Talented, overworked individuals, never trained for their original responsibilities except through on-the-job training, found themselves responsible for all electronic information systems within their agencies. This occurred in the context of unbelievably rapid change in technology.

How to make this crucial group more productive was in everyone's interest and in recent years steps have been taken to do so. In fact, this group of managers has just completed an innovated interagency developmental project which involved the Management Resources Project at the Rockefeller Institute, private sector computer companies, the Division of the Budget and GOER. This project has evolved into an ongoing interagency advisory group, which was created entirely through the initiative of these systems managers.

The moral of the story is that "learning on the job" wasn't good enough for these folks, and it just won't do for their successors—the responsibilities and the costs are simply to high.

What has the history of training been in New York? Prior to 1982, when the Governor's Office of Employee Relations assumed the major responsibility for it, training was largely "on the job." People were hired with skills and knowledge at some level and then largely expected to learn on the job as and when new or expanded skills were required.

In general, I would argue, top level management was not then altogether supportive of training efforts. A few commissioners or their deputies and/or directors of personnel were committed to training—usually those that had more training dollars at their disposal.

By the early 1980s, we recognized that something more substantial and certainly more comprehensive needed to be developed than the sporadic efforts individual agencies could provide. The timing was fortunate. For it was also at this time that the public employee

unions were beginning to focus upon the need for more and better quality training for their membership.

Not so coincidentally, this also signalled the beginning of a more cooperative environment between labor and management in a variety of areas: Employee involvement, the employee assistance program, on-site day care, and other human resource development initiatives.

By making enhancement of personnel part of the contract process and securing executive and legislative support for the overall pay and benefits package, and a more cooperative environment between labor and management, the stalemate regarding training was broken.

At present, we have seven major programs that address the educational and developmental needs of the state work force:

- The management confidential program;
- The public service training program;
- The CSEA program;
- Agency-specific programs;
- Tuition-reimbursement;
- Joint labor/management-sponsored training projects and initiatives that address quality of worklife issues at the agency and facility level;
- The UUP program.

A critical episode in institutionalizing human resources development within the executive branch was the 1982 report by Harvard's Kennedy School on state managers. The report noted that the "general approach to management development and training in New York State has been haphazard and disorganized." Managers, interviewed by the Harvard team, reported that the lack of a comprehensive and coordinated approach to training was "a major barrier" in satisfactorily carrying out their responsibilities.

In designing a management development program, we began where almost no one begins—by talking with people. Building from the Harvard report needs assessment, we laid the groundwork for a system of management training and development—a system structured enough to have meaning, but flexible enough to change as our needs changed. In the ensuing five years, we have slowly and methodically built a system—we call it "Managing New York State"—that is capable of following employees from a point just before they take their first supervisory position to the moment when—theoretically—they are appointed commissioners. Of course there are still gaps in the system—there are gaps in any system that purports to do so much. But, we go about filling those gaps in the same way that we designed the system in the first place—we talk to groups of managers, small and large; we talk to agency leadership and most importantly we listen to what they tell us and then carefully weave new programs into the fabric of our system.

The most gratifying fact of all is that Managing New York State works. We have heard it from the managers who participate in our programs; we've heard it from their managers; we've heard it from our faculty which is drawn from all sectors—public and private,

academic and practitioners—and we have even heard it from the American Society for Training and Development who, in 1985, made us the first governmental entity to receive their distinguished human resource development award. It works in the sense that it accomplishes just what it was intended to accomplish: It brings managers at comparable levels together from our many and diverse agencies and from every corner of New York State; it exposes them to each other and to the thinking of faculty from the finest graduate schools in the country—no small number of whom, by the way, hail from this very institution—and it sends these managers back to the job with a renewed sense of purpose, new skills and knowledge, and a network of colleagues with whom they can continue to share solutions to their common problems.

And that's not all . . . recognizing the fact that learning designed to end in the classroom frequently goes no further than that, we design many of our programs in a way which requires the participants to apply what they've learned back in their workplace by executing specific short-term projects to increase the productivity of their agencies. In some programs, we schedule a follow-up session some months after the main session to give people a chance to get together again and discuss their successes and failures in applying what they've learned. We keep graduates of our programs involved by asking them to serve as project advisors to current participants.

And we encourage individuals to move from one level of our system to the next, continuing to learn and to grow as members of New York's management team. That, after all, is what Managing New York State is all about—rating a highly skilled, motivated team of New York State managers capable of meeting the challenges of an uncertain future within an increasingly complex and demanding environment.

We also recognize that the management team of New York consists of more than just managers—it includes the literally thousands of employees who work in a confidential capacity to those managers. For that reason, we have developed a system that parallels Managing New York State that we call Supporting New York State—a series of courses for our confidential support staff that emphasizes their key role in getting the job done. The cornerstone of Supporting New York State is a week-long secretarial institute—the first such residential program for secretaries in the nation—that, like the management programs, includes an agency-based productivity project, project advisors and a follow-up conference. The secretaries are involved in creating much of their own curriculum design based upon needs dictated by experience.

The emphasis in these programs for both our managers and confidential employees is the same—to improve the way in which the state does business, and to do it by developing the capacity of our individual employees. There may be quicker, more dramatic approaches to improving productivity, but none that has the long-term benefits of the careful, systematic development of the state's human resources.

It should be noted, that we recently began a new special achievement awards program. This "bonus" program is unique in the public sector and is designed to allow commissioners to award performance that is above and beyond the scope of one's normal duties. Awards are provided when tax dollars are saved, or systems improved, and a number of the productivity projects that were developed through our training have been the basis for cash awards ranging from $1,000 to $10,000.

The story is no less dramatic for the 53,000 professional, scientific and technical services employees represented by the public employees federation. Prior to 1983, there was no comprehensive or systematic approach to professional development for this significant group of employees in the state's second largest bargaining unit.

By April of this year, more than 1,000 PSTP courses and workshops had been conducted; 14,000 employees have participated in these courses; many of them taking multiple courses. As a result, 22,000 classroom seats have been filled in some 70 institutions of higher education in New York State that have been involved in delivering the courses, most of which have been credit-bearing and indeed most of which have been given at the graduate level.

PSTP is administered by Rockefeller College on behalf of higher education in general in this state. Courses are offered not only at campuses but at more than 100 worksite locations throughout the state. Approximately 25 percent of the PSTP courses are offered here in the capital district. I have been told that PSTP is the largest university-based program in the country. It represents a unique partnership between academe, state government, and a public sector union.

A program that we believe is without precedent in the United States, PSTP is effectively translating the needs of the workplace into useful training. It is also building a cooperative spirit among academic institutions involved not only in curriculum development but in the current effort to create certificate programs, as well.

The Human Resources Development Program also merits attention.

Both the HRDP and its advanced version—a pilot now in progress—mean that some of the most elusive concepts of supervision will be fair game for program participants.

The advanced courses move more deeply into the challenges of supervision, such as making teams work cooperatively together and developing and preserving the creative qualities of managers under daily pressures, stresses and production schedules.

To encourage integrated supervisory policies, the advanced program uses the same framework as the supervision management courses for employees in the PS&T unit. The Institute for Government and Policy Studies of Rockefeller College, I'm pleased to note, designed and developed both programs for us.

How do we find out what training needs are for a labor-represented work force as large and diverse as New York State's? Primarily from employees themselves, just as we do in the Managing New York and Supporting New York programs. In creating training courses and curricula, we call upon small groups of employees to identify needs and suggest ways in which they might best be met. In the centralized training programs that are in place for management/confidential employees, professional/scientific and technical employees (PS&T) and CSEA (Civil Service Employees Association)—represented employees in the same or similar titles from a number of agencies are called together to consider training needs and how they might best be met.

Surveys are conducted among large numbers of randomly selected employees, and self-assessments are requested. Thus, employees play an important role in helping to create the curricula that will help them become better prepared to handle their current positions and to move into other positions as well.

Because they have a vested interest in securing the best of training for their membership, the public employee unions ensure that as many of their members as possible participate in needs assessments. They play an important role too in curriculum development. Indeed, training today is a collaborative effort among employees, unions, and academic institutions.

In addition to these programs, which are cost-free to the employee, the state has an extensive tuition reimbursement program for its employees. Between April, 1982 and March, 1987, over 50,000 courses have been reimbursed with a total dollar amount of over $5.8 million.

We recognize that there are important training needs sometimes best met within a single agency or among several agencies with similar needs. In response, we created the Human Resource Development Grant Program for M/C and PS&T employees. We also assist agencies in collaborative training projects. In a recent instance, engineers from the Department of Transportation, Office of General Services, and the Department of Environmental Conservation participated in a joint training program that helped them make the transition from engineering professionals to becoming manager-engineers.

The consequences of these collective actions have been dramatically positive. Significantly, we have renewed the emphasis in this state on enhancing human resources, recognizing that our employees are the most important resource we have. Assisting employees in becoming more productive, helping them feel better about their jobs and themselves, as well as how they fulfill their responsibilities naturally leads to improved ways in handling the public's business.

Today, we are able to provide a more coherent training system to assist employees in their current positions as well as helping to prepare them for promotion or for enlarged job responsibilities in their current position. We are even now developing an interagency informational network that will catalog the training background of employees, enabling future course development and selection to be made more coherently than ever before.

Among the more innovative programs now available to SUNY faculty and professionals is the Affirmative Action Leave Program.

Named for the former United University Professions President, Noala McGann Drescher, the program is designed to assist minorities, women, persons with disabilities and Vietnam era veterans prepare for permanent or continuing appointments within the university system through special financial awards.

A similar program is the new Faculty Development Awards Program which provides new, non-tenured, and tenure track faculty who hold term appointments with seed money to enable them to conduct research, apply the results of their scholarly work to the improvement of teaching, or to develop new skills which will enable them to increase their teaching effectiveness.

The newest program is the Senior Associate Pilot Project, a program that will test the feasibility of placing SUNY faculty and staff in danger of retrenchment into other disciplines as well as those seeking a mid-career change into other fields of study into temporary trainee positions for 10 to 12 month period. A stipend equivalent to the individual's salary plus direct

expenses will be made available to five senior associates to be selected from eligible SUNY faculty and staff by the UUP Continuity of Employment Committee.

Important to this administration has been the development of a partnership developed between government and higher education, not only public higher education, but all of higher education in this state. For example, because a preponderance of the courses in the PSTP program are offered for academic credit, the colleges and universities involved in offering the training have had to collaborate to establish standards and criteria of quality. Moreover, the state's faculty resources are major aspects of our training programs for management confidential employees.

This state and its public sector unions have played a leading role in introducing quality to work life programs into the workplace. Our employee involvement programs have made a considerable difference in how managers and employees relate to one another and how tasks and responsibilities are carried out.

Cooperative labor-management programs have contributed a great deal to getting the job done on the public's behalf and I am proud to have been a part of that effort.

Let me conclude by identifying some of the tasks that lie ahead for New York in the area of training and development.

We must make even greater progress toward integrating all of our programs and offering them to state agencies so that they can have an even greater impact on agency effectiveness. Problems don't respect program lines or bargaining unit distinctions; neither should the solutions which we put forward. That means, on one level, that our grant programs must complement our training; our quality of work life efforts must be supplemented by our grant programs. We should offer an integrated, multifaceted array of solutions that recognize the unique needs of our agencies and take advantage of the fact that we are all part of the same New York State government.

On another level, this means that we must continue our efforts to allow individuals to cross bargaining unit lines to participate in programs that are of value. A manager represented by PEF can profit as much from an M/C course as an M/C manager can from a bargaining unit sponsored course in supervisory techniques.

We must be even more sensitive to non-traditional, but equally valuable development opportunities available far from the classroom. An exciting initiative of our division of M/C affairs involves training a group of managers to act as "Internal Consultants" not only to their own agencies, but in helping to solve the problems of other agencies.

Programs like this that offer our managers and professionals new challenges and at the same time begin to solve a real agency problem are the development path of the future.

During the next twelve months we will see similar programs that allow the exchange of employees between the state and both local government and private sector employers. Certainly, we must, within our own organization, seek to develop a workable system that encourages career mobility and the periodic rotation of employees from one agency to another.

We need to know more about the best training and development programs being utilized in the corporate world and how these might be adapted and utilized in government. This holds not only for management development programs, which of course are important, but supervisory and professional skills development programs as well.

And we must ensure that our training and development programs are kept vital, changing, adapting to the needs of government and the public it serves. Efficiency, cost effectiveness and productivity must be our watchwords.

Finally, we need to continue to consider issues associated with long range work force planning, and forecasting our likely future public service employment needs. We know that the demographics of the work force are changing dramatically. Like the general population, state government's work force population is rapidly graying. That means we must begin to think more creatively about benefits and training. The same is true for responses to health care and recruitment. We need to be aware of how to retain skilled, valued, experienced employees in view of the coming changes, just as we have prepared ourselves to attract the best future managers, professionals, and laboring force.

With these challenges in mind, challenges that I am pleased to have been able to share with Rockefeller College and all the many other institutions of higher education in this state– let me conclude by adding that I anticipate a great future for this government, its representative unions, and the higher education alliance.

For there is commonality between us. And that is the recognition that we must, we will meet the needs of a maturing public work force.

Thank you.

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